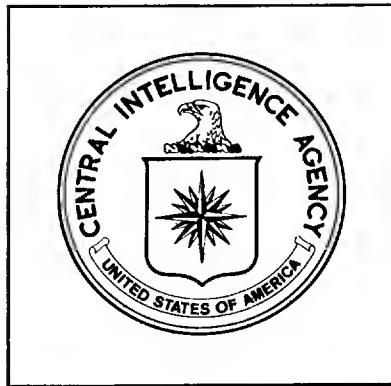


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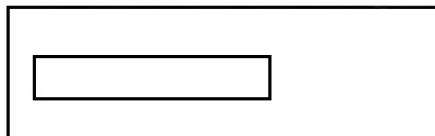
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What Precisely Did the May Plenum Resolve?

The decision of the May 24 Central Committee plenum to appoint Brezhnev to the post of Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet was not revealed until the Supreme Soviet formally acted on the measure at its session on June 16. Even then the plenum resolution was not published, and there obviously has been some controversy over what it resolved.

As reported earlier, what party secretary Suslov said the plenum decided and what Brezhnev subsequently said the plenum did differed significantly. The issue appears to have been resolved in favor of Brezhnev's formula, but doubts have been raised and will remain whether his interpretation can be made to stick.

Party secretary Suslov made the first public reference to the May plenum resolution when he submitted Brezhnev's name to the Supreme Soviet as the leadership's candidate to replace Podgorny in the presidency. Suslov stated that the May plenum "with complete unanimity, deemed it expedient that Comrade Leonid Ilich Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, should simultaneously occupy the post of Chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet."

Brezhnev, speaking the next day at his first meeting as Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet went an important step further than Suslov. Brezhnev referred to the plenum's decision as one "concerning the combining of the posts of General Secretary of the CPSU and Chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet." This formulation strongly implies that the two posts henceforth are to be permanently combined--a boon to whoever aspires to succeed Brezhnev as general secretary and a form of protection to Brezhnev himself, in that it does not allow, as does Suslov's formulation, for restricting Brezhnev at some later date to the honorary presidency alone.

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Suslov's narrower interpretation of the plenum's decision is consistent with his long-time reputation as the guardian of collective leadership and with some reports that he would have opposed the move had there been a chance of stopping it. Other aspects of Suslov's speech all point to an effort to minimize the importance of the plenum decision. In the first place, his speech was very brief. Surprisingly, it was Brezhnev, not Suslov, the party ideologist, who provided the theoretical justification for the decision. Brezhnev cited the constant growth in the leading role of the Communist Party as the main rationale for the decision to combine both posts.

Suslov explained the move in more personal terms, calling attention to Brezhnev's great contributions in foreign policy and noting that for many years Brezhnev had already been acting as the regime's leading statesman. Suslov's brief but complimentary remarks leave the impression that Brezhnev was merely being recognized for a role he had long played.

The first editorial comment on the Supreme Soviet action apparently was published in the evening edition of *Izvestia* on June 18. Whether intentionally or not the editorial seemed to keep the controversy alive. Both formulations were quoted in full with attributions, first Suslov's and then Brezhnev's. Another editorial appeared in the more authoritative *Pravda* the next morning. *Pravda* used only the Brezhnev formulation, and rather than attribute it to him as had *Izvestia*, attributed it directly to a "decision" of the plenum. Thus far, Brezhnev is ahead in the controversy over interpretation.

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Soviet Officials and Scholars at Berkeley Conference
Comment on Sino-Soviet-US Relations

Soviet scholars and officials who attended a US-USSR Conference on Asia in Berkeley, California on May 16-20 voiced a number of strong opinions on Sino-Soviet and Sino-Soviet-US relations. The Soviet delegation included Ivan Kovalenko, chief of the Far East Section of the CPSU International Department; Boris Zanegin, a China expert with the Institute of the USA and Canada; Eugene Primakov, deputy director of the Institute of World Economics and International Relations (IMEMO); and a number of scholars from the various institutes. Their comments are interesting for their interpretation of a number of recent events and for the messages they obviously hoped to convey to Washington.

The Issue of US Arms Sales to Peking

The Soviet delegates clearly had a primary mission to lobby against any US military-related assistance to Peking. Kovalenko asserted in the strongest terms that such actions would severely jeopardize US-Soviet relations, but went on to allege, without elaboration, that the US was already supplying technology and "military hardware" to China. Zanegin affirmed that the major Aleksandrov *Pravda* article on May 14 was timed with tri-lateral Sino-Soviet-US relations in mind and was an attempt to warn the West against arming the Chinese and of the dangers of Chinese militarism. He asserted that the article was intended to prevent the US from "playing its China card" after the SALT impasse in late March. This supports other evidence suggesting that the Soviets were indeed concerned about this after the Vance visit to Moscow. Zanegin also used the opportunity to cite the importance of the "China factor" in Soviet strategic planning, suggesting that this was one of the considerations inhibiting Soviet enthusiasm for strategic arms cuts.

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At the same time, Zanegin, stressed that it was the political implications of any US military aid to China that was Moscow's most immediate concern. He claimed that Moscow would interpret such assistance as endorsement of Peking's policy of global anti-Sovietism and as an indication that the West was moving toward an alliance, informal or otherwise, with China against the USSR. He alleged that a debate in Moscow on how seriously to take the prospect of Western arms sales to Peking had ended with a consensus that it was a real possibility, and acknowledged that the Soviet Union was trying to head off that prospect.

Bilateral Relations

The Soviet delegates claimed that the border between the two countries was quiet, but expressed pessimism about the border negotiations. One official acknowledged that during the recent round of talks, the Chinese were even tougher in their positions than they had been in the past. They admitted that they had hoped for some softening after Mao's death, but now that the Chinese seemed even more antagonistic, they were uncertain about what to do next. Regarding the Chinese demand for Soviet troop withdrawal along the border, Zanegin reaffirmed that there was little prospect of the Soviets doing so until there was an improvement in relations, noting that trust would have to precede such a move, rather than the move being used to generate trust. He cited the vulnerability of Soviet border settlements and the lack of a Soviet industrial base in the Far East as necessities for keeping the large military force in the area. Throughout their discussions, the Soviets used Western figures (approximately 500,000) for the number of Soviet troops along the border.

Zanegin provided the most sophisticated analyses of Chinese affairs. He advanced the opinion that Maoist ideology, especially on foreign policy, had such deep roots in the population and the leadership that it would be difficult to adopt other than an anti-Soviet foreign policy. As a good Marxist, he theorized that only with further socialist economic development would there be an economic base in China allowing for a different foreign policy.

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Peaceful Nuclear Aid Offers

In discussing nuclear proliferation, Zanein made the interesting claim, which we have not seen before, that twice in the 1960s the USSR offered to assist China in developing nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. He did not indicate whether this was under the Khrushchev or Brezhnev leadership. While we have no evidence to back up this claim, it is quite conceivable that the Soviets did put forward such offers as part of the extensive efforts we know they vainly made to restore the economic relationship after 1960. Such proposals would have been quite distinct from assistance to help China develop a nuclear weapon, a request which Khrushchev definitively rejected in 1959.

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